goliath

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Five Nights at Freddy's: Security Breach, Protective Freddy Fazbear, Arguments, Fluff and Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Father-Son Relationship, fazdad, Canon divergence (?), yes roxy and monty are mentioned, more of an emotional tiff then a violent fight this time, sad chica never gets the spotlight when she so deserves it, this goes out to all the three chica lovers out there, also warning for blood mention but it isn't anything too terrible, this is more of a retelling then i intended but i needed most of it for context so

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Part 1 of Stranger In Us All

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by littleleaflings

Summary

Chica is the first to put Gregory in danger. Freddy is worried she won't be the last.

Notes

please note i am still not a writer but apparently people liked my last fic so here's another one

See the end of the work for more notes

—

It all begins with a glitch in his system.

As the day wore on, Freddy noticed how unremarkable it seemed, save for the odd twitch of his limbs. There had been a birthday party for a young boy—age 11, named Jordan, with a Freddy plush crammed in his hands and a gentle smile that the bear was sad to see go—and it was quiet. Well, as quiet as the Pizzaplex could be on a Saturday, when the buzz of their guests rivaled the humming of his circuits.

Chica, ever so observant, had checked up on him several times throughout their usual routine. Roxanne and Montgomery were assigned to a different group of party-goers, only allowed to make brief appearances. The two found it easy to make do—neither Freddy nor Chica have ever had much difficulty getting along, especially as they are the more concrete half of the Glamrock Gang. Two original characters—one, the mascot, and the other, a faithful addition, always keeping to Freddy's left.

The absence on his right is never mentioned. Chica has always been too tactful to let it slip, despite her rather ditzy programming. Quite frankly, Freddy believes it to be mostly an act—she is much too smart

for her own good, sometimes, and occasionally she lets it slip that she knows more than she lets on. It's a relief that he has her—he considers her to be his most trusted confidant, now, and he knows the feeling is mutual.

When Freddy, yet again, swerved into a table, Chica gracefully distracted the children by declaring them to a race, tugging out a handful of tickets. The party-goers had cheered, Chica clucking as she rounded them up to cart them to the maze. Freddy urged them on, wanting to check in with a staff member to try and address the strange whirring at the back of his head, the patterns in his vision—and yet he found himself unable to move, his battery at critical levels.

He must've not been paying attention. It was unusual for him to be so careless. He supposed it was due to the constant attention on him from the children and their birthday boy, but he couldn't find the strength to believe it.

He wasn't surprised when Chica returned shortly after escorting their party to "run off those calories so they could eat them right back!" Her concern is blatant on her face—her eyebrows always furrow in that slight way, her beak twisting at that strange angle.

"Stuck?"

"Yes," Freddy murmured, ears tilting downward in some semblance of shame. "I have not charged in some time. I did not realize until I could not move to alert Melissa."

"You *do* know that you can call for her, right?" Chica rolled her eyes at Freddy's crestfallen expression. "And, no, you aren't being a burden by doing that. Sometimes we lose track of time, with all the work we have to do!"

"I am truly sorry." Freddy's ear flicked as he pinged the maintenance worker by her Faz Watch. "I simply do not wish to interrupt anyone."

"You aren't." Chica chirped, patting Freddy's shoulder. "I promise you, the staff are here to help, you know! It's their job to make sure we're up and running."

"That is true." Freddy frowned as another piece of code interrupted his line of sight. For an instant, there was a purple flashing. It was... rather unsettling, and he was thankful it disappeared as quickly as it came. "I hope I am able to be reprogrammed before the show begins. I am experiencing some sort of issue and I believe it could compound my errors."

Chica clucked, shaking her head. "I don't think we have enough time to get you to Parts and Service. We have to get the kids fed once I bring them back, and then the show has to start. I'm sure we'll be able to do it right after, though."

"I hope that is the case." Freddy spotted Melissa out of the corner of his eye, walking straight towards the pair of animatronics. He knew that Chica would depart the moment that she could, back to their group. "However, I must say this... thank you."

"Oh, don't worry so much, Fred!" Chica's beak tilted in a wide grin, her eyes sparking with warmth. "It's what friends do. We have to set a good example, now, don't we?"

"Of course." Freddy was aware his smile could not rival hers, but he attempted it nonetheless. "I am thankful for your friendship. Now, I believe you ought to go back to Mazercize. I will make sure there is fresh pizza for Jordan and his friends when you return."

"I owe you one." Chica nodded her head towards Melissa, waving as she backed up towards the escalators. "Catch you later! Don't cause too much trouble, you hear?"

"I will make sure not to!" Freddy called out after her, raising his own arm as high as his battery would allow.

How grateful he was for her company.

And how he had failed to follow her warning.

Not long after Melissa had gotten him recharged, she had informed him of the same timing issue. She assured him that she'd make sure to get him reprogrammed during their post-show checks once the elevator had gotten him to Parts and Service. Although it still worried him, he had nodded along, ensuring that the children had plenty of pizza and cake to eat.

Chica had returned not long after, tugging open Freddy's stomach hatch to reveal the hidden goods. She had giggled in delight, cutting the cake up for their group, all while Freddy had begged them to eat their pizza before dessert.

Shortly after that, the lights had dimmed in the Pizzaplex, and it was time to go on stage.

He remembers most of the events in bits and pieces. Getting on stage, checking their instruments, polite chatter between the four of them, all passed in a blur, before the lift clicked and began to rise. Something must have clued Chica into his hesitation, as her hand had rubbed at his back, her smile encouraging.

They did their usual theatrics. He remembers the fog, the lights, the pyrotechnics. He remembers the roar of the crowd, how it rattled his ears, how the corners of his vision flashed with sudden warnings. How, as he belted, it overflowed, and he was forced to stand still as electricity sparked from his neck, his eyes, his endoskeleton seizing.

He remembers falling. He remembers the startled calls from the crowd, alarmed and worried for him. He spotted Chica, before his vision went dark, leaning over him, concerned, a hand grasping his shoulder as she called his name. How the staff crowded around him, Melissa shaking her head when another member gestured to the lift's button. *Too frazzled,* she had said. *Get him to his room,* she had said.

He remembers a vague sensation of someone opening his hatch, when the rest of the world had gone silent around him.

And when he awakens properly in his room, alert and confused, a heaviness weighs on him, unfamiliar and yet oddly calming.

He takes a moment to double-check his systems. Safe Mode switches on—he questions why it was off in the first place, and a chill runs up his back. It's his defensive protocol—he is not designed to harm humans or fellow machines, and Safe Mode is that barrier. How long had it been off? He flits through his memory, taking note of a screenshot he had made when his systems were overriding—it seems that he had been overloaded when there was an attempt to turn it off electronically.

It is a manual system. It is only meant to be turned off when he is undergoing maintenance. The chill settles in his components.

"Showtime already?" His jaw clicks as he speaks, blue eyes shifting to

ivory as he runs a diagnostics check. "I am experiencing a malfunction. The recharge cycle is not complete."

"Shh! Will you *shut up?!"*

Freddy blinks. His head swerves around the room—the couch in the corner is empty, save for a bunch of plush toys and his bowling balls. Nothing is near the arcade machine, and when he turns his head around, all he is greeted with is but a handful of deflating balloons, his trash can and a handful of camera lights.

"Who said that?"

"I did! I'm down here!" Freddy looks directly at his feet, and finds only the carpeted flooring.

"Down where? I still do not see you."

"Okay, listen." There's a breath before the next few words. "You were *sleeping,* so I opened the stomach hatch and climbed inside."

Freddy jolts to attention, eyes widening in alarm. With how finicky he's been the past few hours, he had been cautious when he had put the cake in his hatch—but that was certainly no place for a child!

"My stomach hatch? That place is reserved for oversized birthday cakes and piñatas! It is not a safe play area!"

A child being in his stomach hatch explains the heaviness below his

chest, and his ebbing battery life. Opening up the hatch, Freddy carefully pulls it open all the way, paws grasping at the human inside.

When he tugs the child out, he suppresses his surprise. It's a boy, his brown hair tangled and long, his clothing dirty and creased. His shoes seem to be from the gift shop, and his brown eyes gleam with indignation, his legs lashing out.

"There you are!"

"Put me down!" The boy wriggles in Freddy's grip, the bear gently lowering him to the floor. Before he releases him, he scans him, light from his gaze causing the boy to clench his eyes shut and scowl.

When he is done scanning his face, his systems come up with—

—... absolutely nothing.

No matches, whatsoever. No clue of identity, no link to his parents, no phone number to call. Not even an email address. This boy might as well be a ghost for all the system knows.

"Scanning complete." Freddy finally lets go, the boy shaking his head to get the stars out of his vision. "How odd. Your guest profile is unknown to me. Who are you?"

The boy wipes at his nose, brown eyes glaring up at the bear, as if he's personally wronged him somehow. Freddy notices a cut on his elbow, scab fresh.

"I-I'm Gregory."

He does not know it at the time, but this boy is what changes Freddy's mechanical life.

"Gregory." Freddy nods, opening up his messaging service. "I will notify the main office."

The boy freezes at his words, teeth clenched. Concern crosses Freddy's face, worsening when his message doesn't go through to their head security guard. When he attempts to call, it drops automatically.

"Huh, connection error. I cannot connect to the main network."

The boy's sigh is inaudible, but his shoulders loosen, fingers twisting together as he narrows his eyes up at the bear.

"It's *her*. She's not going to let you call for help until she *finds me*."

"Who? Who is looking for you?" Freddy lowers his head, ears twitching. "Your mother?"

Gregory's face tightens, something harsh settling on his features. It is a strange expression to see, especially on someone so young.

When Gregory opens his mouth to reply, there is a shuffle of feet outside of the glass pane separating them from the rest of Rockstar

Row. The boy bounds over to the curtains, eyes widening.

"Shh! I hear footsteps."

Freddy is careful when he steps behind the boy to peer out with him. When he spots a familiar blonde woman carrying a flashlight, he smiles.

"That is the security guard. She can help!"

"No! No, I don't trust her." Gregory shrinks back behind the red curtain, hands balled into fists.

"Why not?"

"I don't know who she is, but *she's trying to get me."* Gregory glares, puffing his cheeks out. Freddy resists the urge to call it cute. "Isn't there some other way for you to communicate with me without talking so loudly?"

Quite rude, Freddy thinks to himself, but he simply runs a check on his person, especially his stomach hatch, turning on the sensors inside. It isn't something he usually does, but it seems wise to do so, just in case the boy decides to crawl inside it again.

"Take this." Freddy opens his hatch, pointing to the watch tucked in the corner. The boy must've sat on it without noticing. "It is a novelty Freddy Faz Watch."

Gregory is... cautious as he approaches, and Freddy's fingers twitch as he tries not to comfort him. It seems like it would have the opposite of the intended effect—the boy has some grit to him, uncommon to most children his age.

If Freddy had to guess, he would say Gregory is around ten years, or even twelve, but he's... well, *tiny,* and Freddy doesn't want to make any wrong assumptions.

"Fine." He pulls it out, jerking when a notification rings out. "What was that?"

"I am sending you an encoded message." Freddy's ear flicks, straightening up, pointing to the watch. When Gregory fumbles with it to put it on, Freddy gently puts a hand on his shoulder, tilting his head in a silent question.

The boy huffs, holding out his wrist to help Freddy attach it properly. The bear openly grins in delight, proud that Gregory allows him to do so.

He clicks it on, the watch face glowing. Freddy's own voice, tinny and quiet, leaks out from it.

"Hello, Gregory! It is me, Freddy. I will escort you to the main entrance. However, I am unable to leave this room. You should have no problem. There is a button on the wall that will open the door to the back room. I will make it accessible to you now."

Gregory's lips upturn in some kind of smile. Freddy counts it as a success.

When the boy turns and presses the green button on the wall, Freddy speaks through the watch yet again. "Well done, Gregory." The boy seems to brighten up at the praise, and Freddy catalogues it for later. "There is an open air vent inside of the maintenance room. You will have to climb through the ventilation system and release me from the outside."

Nodding to himself, the boy grimaces at the shadowy tunnel, turning to Freddy, as if seeking his guidance.

"It's... pretty dark in there."

"There is nothing to be scared of." Freddy waves his arm, pumping his fist. "You can do it."

Sucking in a tight breath, Gregory runs off into the open entryway, leaving Freddy to cycle through the security camera feed in order to keep track of him.

And with his thoughts.

It is very strange to have a guest with no identification. He cannot recall another occurrence of such a thing, especially after hours. The Pizzaplex security were steadfast in preventing the place from looters and thieves, especially as the animatronics are advanced machinery. They could not afford a liability risk, and due to copyright, patents on their functions were a secret all but to a very small group of people.

So for a boy to somehow slip in, and crawl, of all things, into his *stomach hatch,* is an odd thing indeed.

Besides, why is he so afraid of Vanessa? Sure, she can be surly at times, but only if you angered her, and she wasn't quick-tempered. He couldn't understand why the boy is so eager to stay out of her sight. What had happened between them to make Gregory so frightened?

He tries to bat away the reminder buzzing at the back of his skull. Gregory may be the first child without identification to be around after hours, but his protocol was not one established by his programming.

This had happened once before—perhaps not exactly like this scenario, but close enough.

Clicking his nails against his leg, he listens to the voice on the intercom ringing out in the plaza proper. They have a limited time before closing—hopefully, once he is out of his room, they can take the service tunnels down to the entrance, and get Gregory out of the complex before the doors shut for the night.

When Gregory passes by the glass, Freddy rights himself, smiling as he waves. Although the boy still seems to be nervous, his eyes light up, and he returns the smile.

It makes him look his age. It also makes an indescribable warmth seep into Freddy's components, to see the boy delighted at the sight of a friendly face.

When Gregory attempts to open the door, however, it refuses to budge. He tugs at it, grunting at the strain, before letting go, slumping against it.

"The stupid door won't open."

"Oh?" Freddy's servos hiss in some resemblance of a sigh. "You are going to need a Photo Pass to open the door. Apologies, I assumed you had one already..." If only his door wasn't locked from the inside. "Well, you should be able to find one at a convenience counter."

"And where would I find one of those?"

Freddy hums, flicking through a handful of cameras. "There should be one right to your left, through the exit. It shouldn't be too far of a walk."

"Okay." Gregory raps his knuckles against the metal as he turns around to try and find one. "I'll come back soon."

“Of course.” *And off he goes again,* thinks Freddy, keeping his eye on the clock as he ignores the heat of worry stirring his fans. Time keeps ticking by, slowly but surely, and Freddy is starting to get impatient while sitting around, unable to do much of anything, trapped in his own parlor.

Thankfully, Gregory returns with a photo pass in a short period of time, Freddy making sure to congratulate him the moment he finds it. His hands shake as he presses it to the door, glancing over his shoulder, leaning heavily on one leg. When it unlatches and pulls aside, Freddy stoops down to grasp his arms gently, the boy looking up at him.

"Way to go, superstar! I knew you could do it."

Gregory's eyes shine. He lowers them, bashfully, not wanting to clue Freddy in on how relieving that is to hear.

"I know how to get you out of here. Climb back into my chest cavity." The boy swallows. "There is still time, but we must hurry. If I am spotted, I will certainly be taken back to my room. I will escort you to the main exit through the utility tunnels. It is the safest path."

Gregory bites his lip. "Okay... but you have to be careful moving around. I don't want to be crushed and twisted into a meat pretzel."

Freddy nods, and opens the hatch. It's not even a question that he will ensure the boy is alright.

As Gregory clambers up, Freddy pulls him by his knees so he can more easily climb inside. He jostles in his grip, surprised and jittery from the cold touch, and tenderly slides the leg he's favoring inside, carefully tucking the other after he sits. The moment the boy is secure, his hatch shuts around him.

It's not a bad sensation, to have the boy where he doesn't belong.

"It's really... cramped in here," Gregory grouses as Freddy pushes forward, heading towards the entrance of the security tunnels.

"As I have mentioned before, children are not usually permitted to crawl into my chest cavity. Unless I open it, it is not able to budge." Surveying the room, it seems they are alone. No Vanessa in sight. When he turns his head to check down the hall, he notices that the other rooms are empty. Have his friends already been moved to Parts and Service?

They shouldn't be. It is not yet midnight, and most repairs occur after closing.

Something churns in his stomach. He knows that it's just Gregory adjusting his position in his hatch, but the irony is not lost on him.

Returning back to the task at hand, Freddy pries open the doors and walks down the service tunnel, dust and steam ghosting over his casing. He is careful when he steps down the stairs, his body having to compensate for the precious cargo he now possesses. When they arrive near the bottom, something scrapes below them, and he hears Vanessa's voice, loud and clear:

"Hello? Little boy? If you're down here, say something!"

Gregory shoves his palms against the metal plate of his hatch, jostling Freddy and putting him off balance. "She's down here! We have to go back."

Tilting his head up, Freddy's throat clicks, clambering down the final few steps. "Do not worry, Gregory." He soothes. "Even if we are spotted, you are safe with me. She would never suspect we are traveling together. However, we should still do our best to avoid her." He flicks open the lock to the next door, a S.T.A.F.F. bot wiping up the concrete flooring next to him. He bows his head to it and presses on, heavy steps echoing in the dimly lit hallway. "If I am sent back to my room, we will never get to the lobby before midnight."

Further down the hallway, Freddy turns sharply, Gregory hissing in pain as his leg digs into the side of the hatch. Considering it for a moment, Freddy runs a diagnostic check on the boy—and realizes that Gregory is nursing an injured leg. He curses himself internally for not noticing, changing his course from the lobby to first-aid immediately.

"I feel you are broken." His voice is soft, softer than he intends it to

be.

"Don't worry. I'm fine." The boy spits, hand clutching the top of the hatch as Freddy hastens his pace. It comes out quick, and fast—the cramped quarters must be worsening the pain.

"No." He is firmer now, addressing the problem directly. "I feel that something is wrong. I am taking you to the first-aid station."

Gregory bangs his fist against the hatch. Freddy ignores him. "There's no time! I'm fine!" He continues to ignore him.

He knows they are running out of time. It is why he is so insistent on making sure Gregory isn't injured before he is out of the complex.

Besides, he knows that sometimes children claim they are fine when they are not. Freddy likes to believe he knows better than to blindly trust every word spoken to him.

He is gentle when he pulls Gregory out of his hatch. The boy is frustrated, certainly, but Freddy is able to administer at least the basics of first-aid for guests, and Gregory is no different.

He double checks his work and finds another scratch on Gregory's cheek, hidden by his hair. No matter—there are plenty of band-aids.

He finds a kit stashed in the small stall, pulling the curtain aside. Gregory grits his teeth and refuses to sit down when Freddy asks him to, crossing his arms.

"Where does it hurt?"

"It doesn't matter." Gregory bit out. "She could be here any second now, and you're trying to put bandages on a kid you're not gonna see again after I get out of here."

Freddy's ears lower at his dismissive tone. "Please, Gregory. I want to help you."

The boy considers him for a moment. "Why?"

"What?" Freddy lowers himself closer to the ground, meeting him at eye level. "Why would I not want to help you?"

"Every adult I've ever met has been mean to me." Gregory explains, nails digging into the soft skin of his inner arm. "I know you're a robot, but that still doesn't mean I can trust you."

"Gregory." Freddy considers him for a moment, hand gently wrapping around the boy's small wrist. He pulls his hand from where it was, scratches red and blotchy on his skin. He feels so *frail* in Freddy's grip as he cups his hand instead, holding it. "I may not be aware of how mean adults have been to you in the past. I know some adults can be very cruel." He sinks his head lower, squeezing Gregory's hand. The boy is shaking now, something bubbling to the surface that Freddy has to be very delicate with. "However, that does not mean that I am not listening to you. I understand you are afraid. I want to make sure that no adult can hurt you while you are here, including Officer Vanessa. I may not know why you are scared," he rubs his thumb over Gregory's knuckles, "but I am here to assist all children. That includes you."

"Are you sure?" Gregory whispered, wrapping his fingers into Freddy's own blocky ones. He is so small, much too small. An urge rises in

Freddy's throat, stronger than it usually is when he comforts his guests —how desperate this boy must be, wanting to get home and be away from the place that scares him.

"I swear it." Gingerly, Freddy nudges his nose against Gregory's forehead, smiling down at him. "Now, where does it hurt? Are you okay with telling me?"

The boy blinks, hard, sitting down in the seat below him. Freddy is bent at an awkward angle to hold his hand, but he continues to do so, leaning down to see where the boy is pointing to. There's a gash on his right knee, blood leaking down to stain his sock red.

He feels terrible when he has to pull his hand away from Gregory's. For the kit, though, he needs both hands. Gregory's own falls to the bottom of the seat, gripping it.

"That is a nasty scrape." Freddy opens the first-aid kit, pulling out a piece of gauze, a large band-aid and some rubbing alcohol wipes. "How badly does it hurt?"

"It's fine." Gregory mumbles. When Freddy tuts, the boy snorts, giving in. "Okay, it actually hurts a lot. I slipped and fell trying to crawl through the door because it wouldn't open all the way."

"I am sorry, Gregory." Freddy first wets a washcloth he finds next to the sink, wiping away the excess blood. "You were not going to tell me, hm?"

"Big kids don't talk about getting hurt." Gregory's hands flex as Freddy dabs at the wound directly. "Besides, I've gotten worse scrapes than this."

Freddy opts not to reply to that. Instead, he tugs a wipe out of the container. "I have to clean the wound properly using this. It may sting. Is that alright?"

"It's fine." Gregory pulls his knee up so Freddy could have easier access, hissing when the wipe rubs at the open wound.

"I apologize, Gregory." Freddy pats the boy's leg, freeing the band-aid and pressing it on his wound. It has his face stamped onto it, cheerful and glimmering under the dim light—Gregory touches it, raising his eyes to meet Freddy's own.

He does the same with the scratch on his cheek, no matter how Gregory huffs at being pampered. Freddy can't help it.

"Very good, superstar." Freddy smiles, shutting the first-aid kit and rising, extending a hand towards the boy. "Now we can head to the lobby."

Gregory seems to be at a loss of what to do. Freddy wonders if the boy is confused, but he seems to be simply gathering his wits.

And then, he shyly smiles, being careful when he puts his foot on the ground as he rises to take Freddy's hand.

He has noticed how rare Gregory's smiles are. They flit on his face like he does not believe them to belong there, but Freddy is inclined to disagree. He wishes, if only for a second, that he could see that smile all the time.

Then he hears a tapping. Subtle, yes, but getting louder. Gregory's shy smile twists into a terrified frown, yanking his arm out of Freddy's hold. It sounds like it is coming from their right—Freddy vaguely remembers a cyclone fence is there, and knows Vanessa has every key to the locks that Monty refuses to pick—and shoves the curtain back into place. Within seconds, he has backed away towards the opening of the gate, and as he settles into position, the security guard he has been trying *not* to cross paths with comes around the corner.

"Freddy! You're supposed to be on lockdown!"

The bear manages a glance towards the curtain. Gregory is clutching the red fabric, eyes wide, watching.

He's going to have to be... generous, with his details.

"Officer Vanessa, I-I do not know how I got here." He flinches at how unconvincing it sounds, even to his own ears, but Vanessa just tugs on the brim of her hat, scowling.

"Well, you totally blew it tonight, you know." Freddy's neck sinks into his casing. "Your system crashed and you ruined the show. Now, Parts and Service have you on reduced power." She rolls her eyes. "They say it's a safety precaution. Just one more thing to deal with..."

Thoroughly picked apart, Freddy bows his head, hands clenching and loosening as embarrassment burns his electronics. "I... apologize."

"Okay." Vanessa's mouth twists, her green eyes glittering as she brushes her flashlight over him. "Look, we're about 15 minutes from closing, and some kid is sneaking around backstage." The curtains curl around in a ball near the center. Freddy forces his focus back onto the woman in front of him. "If you see *anything,* notify me immediately. I

already alerted the others." He does not tell her that he will not be doing that, and even if he was inclined to do so, his connection to the main server seemed to be unstable at best, unusable at worst. “Now, go back to your room!"

She leaves the way she came, flashlight streaking across the red curtain. Freddy's shoulders tighten as she passes by it without checking, only releasing when her footsteps start to fade.

"I told you she was after me." Gregory slips out of the first-aid station, rubbing his palm against his fresh band-aid.

"I said nothing." Freddy opens his hatch. They are starting to get dangerously close to closing, and his battery life has been on the decline for a while. "I will keep you safe. Let us go."

He has to rush to get through the security tunnels proper, S.T.A.F.F. bots swerving around him as he heads deeper into the depths.

"Where are we?" Gregory says, clutching at the cords at the top of the hatch like it's a lifeline.

"We are now under the Pizzaplex." Freddy supplies, skirting past some leftover equipment. "These utility tunnels connect all the attractions."

"We can go anywhere in the building?"

"Correct." Freddy passes by another cyclone fence, and knows he's close to the exit to the lobby. *Just a little further.* "Fazer Blast, Monty Golf, Roxy Raceway: they are all accessible to S.T.A.F.F.—with high enough clearance, of course." His vision is suddenly overtaken by a

red blaring—LOW POWER, his system says, the flashing letters disorienting him. Tightening his jaw, Freddy keeps up his upbeat cheer, hoping Gregory can't hear his diagnostics ringing out in warning. "Guests are never allowed down here, but yours is a... special situation."

Gregory snorts, leaning back in the hatch. Freddy manages to get down the next hallway, and he sees the doors that lead to the security office. Just a few more steps, just a little bit longer—

—and then his vision flickers, his hatch opening without his consent.

He is thankful Gregory is not ejected. The boy pokes his head out to check up on him, a gasp tearing out of his throat when he sees the red coating Freddy's face from his eyes. It happens very rarely, usually only at low power, but he can understand how it can be frightening.

He is far more frustrated with himself than anything.

"What's wrong?"

"I am terribly sorry." Freddy shuts his eyes as his systems recalibrate, the backup generator starting up. Gregory jostles and has to jump out, watching Freddy shift, stricken. "The recharge cycle had not yet completed when I found you. You must continue without me. I will guide you on your Faz Watch in case you get into any trouble."

His feet begin to move on their own, pinging the nearest recharge station. It is, thankfully, only the next corner down, but Gregory trails after him, eyes wide. "I-I don't know if I can do this alone!"

The recharging station, with its blinding blue light, whirrs to life when Freddy presses his paw to the scanner, opening it for him. "I am afraid you must, at least until I recharge. It should not take long." Pointing to the doorway, Freddy jerks his head in a nod. "You only have to go through the next hallway. I believe there is a security office—I will keep you informed, and keep you safe."

"Okay." Gregory's face darkens as Freddy steps into the tube, the door closing around him. He presses his back into the metal, servos hissing in relief as the wires plug into his back. He usually had the longest battery life out of all of the animatronics, due to his high demand among children, but that was no longer the case with his low-power mode.

When Gregory presses his hand to the glass, Freddy presses his own over it, looking down at the boy.

Freddy doesn't want to do this. He doesn't want to leave the boy to fend for himself, not if he can help it. He is sure he won't get lost, as long as he follows Freddy's instructions. But the fact that his fellow bandmates were not in their rooms concerns him. He is sure they will not hurt Gregory—but they may keep him from the exit, in their effort to speak to him, and the boy may become trapped as a result.

"Go." Freddy forces himself to say. "I will be with you shortly. Be safe."

"I will." Gregory's hand slips from the glass, and he nods. "I will."

Freddy has to watch, yet again, as Gregory steps through the door.

He supposes it gives him time to think, but he is antsy. With midnight so close, he shouldn't be stuck behind, just like before, cycling through

camera feeds as Gregory bolts from the hallway he had just turned into.

When he spots Chica clucking at a bunch of paint cans now on the floor, he lurches in his spot.

She's covered in a light greasing of dirt and grime, stray garbage hanging from her beak. The fact that she was still having issues with being unable to differentiate from food and garbage was one thing—why was she *out?*

Gregory's voice sputters at Freddy's temples not a second later. "I-is Chica supposed to be down here?!"

"No," Freddy keeps his voice level, Chica's head turning down the opposite hallway. "We are all meant to return to our rooms after our routine maintenance, once the show is over and our guests have left. She should not be down here at all, much less so close to closing..."

"I think the security guard told the animatronics to look for me!" Gregory whimpers, the sound of his footsteps audible over the comms. "She said that she had 'informed the others!' Freddy, how am I supposed to avoid them? What if they find me?!"

"Gregory, deep breaths." He cycles through the next set of cameras, spotting the boy crouching next to a heavy doorway. *There.* "With me, alright?" He mimes a deep inhale, then an exhale, his fans whirring as he switches back to where Chica is. She seems to be preoccupied, at least for now, but he hears her voice, tinny and horrible, on the line while Gregory sucks in tight breaths. *"Who wants candy?..."*

Chica, that is not going to encourage the boy to come to you! Freddy flexes his paws, wishing he could slam down the recharge station's

door and scoop Gregory back into him. This situation was highly unusual, and a terrible feeling was creeping through the whole of him. His battery was around 50 percent now, due to the backup generator, but it still gave him very little wiggle room once he could finally leave. *And we do not have much time... 12 more minutes left!*

"Gregory, do you feel better?" When the boy grunts his assent, Freddy taps the side of the station, willing Chica to hold back just a little longer from going down the hallway. "Good. You have to keep going. There is a tunnel between here and the nearest security office."

Gregory grunts again. He shivers underneath the camera's watchful eye, tense from his interaction with Chica, and the incoming threat of possible exposure. He hears her again, closer this time. *"This area is off limits!"*

"Once you make it through that tunnel, you can enter the office. You just have to get through it. Think you can manage it, superstar?"

"I can." Gregory's voice is rough, but solid. "How close are you to getting out and helping me?"

11 minutes left! 59% charge!

"Not much closer, I am afraid." Freddy was starting to itch under his casing. "Be cautious. I do not believe there are any S.T.A.F.F. bots in that tunnel, but I very well could be wrong."

"What will they do?"

"I am uncertain." Freddy's ears twitch. "It depends on how high their

security level has been set. I doubt Vanessa has set it very high, but with Chica out..."

"Okay." Gregory sucks in a final deep breath. "Okay. Just through this tunnel. Got it."

10 minutes left! 66% charge!

When Gregory edges into the tunnel, there is a moment of relative peace. There isn't any S.T.A.F.F. bots either he nor Freddy can see, and although the red, dim light is a little frightening, it's quiet.

When he steps into line of the cyclone fence, that peace is lost.

"There you are!" With a howl, Monty breaks through the fence like it's made of paper, Gregory shrieking in surprise. Freddy jolts in place, jaw dropping in horror as the boy is forced to sprint down the hallway, Monty clambering after him.

"Gregory!" Freddy exclaims. "You only have to get to the stairs. The hallway is just a little bit away! Keep going!"

The boy shoves open the doors in the direction of the lobby, flailing as Monty attempts to jump after him. He misses his mark by mere inches, Gregory slipping to the catwalk and having to slide to keep his momentum. Behind him, another gate rattles as Roxy claws at its lock, snarling. Not a second later, Chica pops out from behind a stack of boxes the moment Gregory turns down the next part of the hallway. "Lost boy over here!" She coos, Gregory pelting up the stairs. Each step is a potential hurdle jumped, especially as the staircase is made of metal, rattling with every step. By the time he's past the steps and where he needs to be in, he is completely wiped, and Freddy tries to comprehend exactly what he had just seen.

Monty, Roxy and Chica had just chased after the boy like he was *prey*.

9 minutes left! 73% charge!

While Gregory heaves his breaths, Freddy practically wilts, the boy leaning against the wall. What a horrible endurance test this boy has had to go through. Thankfully, it is almost over, although they do not have much time to spare.

"Do you see that doorway down the hall, to your left?"

"Yes."

"It is the security office." Quickly, Freddy manages to find the number on the door in his database, and it flies open. "You should be quite safe there."

8 minutes left! 77% charge!

Gregory, after sucking in another tight breath, runs inside. Without any hesitation, Freddy closes the door behind him. It slams shut with substantial weight, the boy's trembling easing, if only a little bit.

"Good job, Gregory." The words calm him even more. *Good.* "The doors were designed to keep our highly-trained security staff safe in the event of an emergency. As long as the doors stay closed, which they will, as long as they have ample power..."

They realize the immediate problem at the same time.

"Freddy, the power is only at 15 percent!" Another problem arises as Freddy jumps from camera to camera: Chica was alerted by the door slamming shut, and is now rushing straight to the source of the noise, twisting her head violently as she surveys the hallway. She isn't the only one; Monty, who must have come from another exit, must have been alerted by her, and now he is coming down the opposite direction. Freddy is surprised by the speed at which he moves—he is well aware that they have a script for such an incident with an intruder, but Gregory is still a *child*.

His fears worsen when Monty slams his shoulder into the door, pounding on the metal. Eyes wide, Freddy wrestles with the latch to the recharge station—the boy is in danger, and he needs to get to him, *now*.

7 minutes left! 81% charge!

"They're pounding on the door!" Gregory is in near hysterics now, the banging rattling in Freddy's head as he claws at the latch. *It's stuck,* and the port refuses to release him. *Safety precaution,* his program supplies dimly, *for charging when in low power mode. You are not allowed to leave until your battery is fully charged.* "How am I going to get out of here?"

Willing his fans to cool his interior, and for his battery to charge *faster,* Freddy stills, fingers still prying at the latch. "Do not panic." His voice is eerily calm, despite how desperate he is to get to the boy. Monty pounds on the door yet again, not stopping his assault. He needs to *focus.* "You should see an interface on the security desk. Hold on while I make it accessible to you..."

He flies through the files, finding the one he's looking for as Monty's

foot crashes against the door, a dent now formed in the metal. "There. You should now be able to access security protocols."

6 minutes left! 86% charge!

Gregory slaps the button on the desk, his breath coming in hard and fast. Freddy connects the boy's Faz Watch signal to the rest of the complex's cameras, and the message manages to get through.

"Your Faz Watch is now connected to the security camera system. Are you on the map?"

"Yes!" Gregory cries, peering at the data squashed on his tiny screen. Monty slams into the door, now throwing his full weight into it. Freddy cycles through a handful more cameras, spotting Roxy sprinting towards the nearest service tunnel. *No, no, no! We are so close! Why are they coming after him like this?* "Tell me what to do!"

5 minutes left! 89% charge!

"Those boxes on your mini-map are nearby security cameras," Freddy rushes, the latch he was fiddling with refusing to give. "When movement is detected by the cameras motion sensors, you should see red alert icons." The bear clenches his fist and slams it against the station's glass in frustration. It shatters around him, allowing him another chance to scrape at the outside latches. There is no time to feel bad about the damage—he *has* to get out of here. "S-switch between the cameras to find a safe path out of the office and into the main lobby."

"And the other door?"

All of the latches stay steadfast. That isn't going to work, and he can't afford to keep prying at them. Instead, he opts for trying a different method. He swats at the scanner, but can't manage to get his hand far enough to reach it—he twists his arm in his socket, clawing at the edge of it with his fingertips. *Come on! Just a little further!* "Y-you can open it with the press of the button that must be next to it."

4 minutes left! 94% charge!

"But what about you?!"

Freddy arches his body as far as it can go, and manages to sink his palm on the scanner. His shoulder starts clicking from the strain, but the lights inside the machine turn red, an automated voice ringing out: *"Occupant already inside. Please refer to the service manual if the recharging station is empty."*

"I am not yet done charging," Freddy grits out, slamming against the side of the machine. It rattles in place, but the wires still remain stuck in his back, and no matter how hard he tugs, they have ensnared him. "I am almost finished, but the machine will not let me leave until I fully charge, or I find a different way out."

3 minutes left! 97% charge!

"I-I can't get out of here without you!"

"You have to," Freddy lashes out against his enclosure, and still, despite the warning lights flashing, it would *not let go!* He checks his camera feed, spotting Chica nearing the edge, the double doors to the lobby right at her back.

Just a little further!

2 minutes left! 99% charge!

"Freddy, please!"

"Superstar." Freddy can't continue his assault on this horrible cage he's been trapped in—he is *so close* to getting out, but he knows that he won't manage to get to Gregory in time. Nevertheless, he *must* ensure the child gets out. Whatever is happening to his fellow animatronics is not happening to *him,* and thus it is *his* responsibility to ensure the boy's safety. "I believe in you."

For a terrible moment, Freddy believes Chica will turn around.

Instead, she goes down the hallway. There is now a straight path from the opposite door to the lobby.

"Now! *Go!"*

1 minute left! 100% charge!

Gregory snaps the door open with the button and rushes out into the hallway the moment the station's door does the same.

Freddy hits the ground running. The main exit has a garage shutter that covers the doorway whenever midnight hits in order to protect the mall. If they are even a little too slow, it will unfurl and trap Gregory inside.

If Freddy is there quickly enough, he can hold the door up while Gregory slides underneath and gets out of the building.

When he slams into the wall of the security office's hallway, the door that had kept Gregory safe flips up, Monty marching into the room with a roar. He narrowly avoids meeting paths with both Chica and Monty, rushing behind Gregory and into the lobby.

The doors burst open. The pink light from above casts everything in harsh lighting. Every step drags on for an eternity, for too long.

They turn the corner.

The intercom sparks on.

"Freddy Fazbear's Mega Pizzaplex is now closed."

No.

"Initiating nighttime protocols."

No!

His cheerful face, plastered all over the garage hanger, is now rolling over the doorways.

0 minutes left!

"No, *no! Wait!"* Gregory rushes at the doors, the shutters smacking against the ground the moment he is within reach. Freddy slows his steps, static buzzing in his ears. "I'm still here! I-I'm still..."

An abject *failure.*

Despite everything they had just endured, *together,* it was all for naught.

Setting his jaw, Freddy stands over the boy, who has his face in his hands, peeking through his fingers to see if, by some miracle, the shutters would rise.

Instead, it was only his cartoon expression facing them. Mocking them.

Gregory swallows, heavily, his throat clicking with the weight of his new reality sinking on him, sliding down to his knees.

He is stuck here.

To his credit, the boy doesn't cry. He sucks in all of his tears, his face blotchy from his running, hands curling into fists.

"Now what am I supposed to do?"

Freddy snaps to attention. He, too, still has an obligation to protect the boy.

He hears the door slam open behind them.

"Gregory."

The boy tilts his head up, brown eyes red-rimmed and shining. And yet, no tears fall.

"You have to get in."

Freddy's hatch opens.

"You missed your chance, but there is still hope." Freddy holds out his hands to the boy, his resolve strengthening his words. "You should be able to escape when the security doors reopen at 6 AM." The boy blinks. He can hear heavy footsteps, getting louder and louder. Freddy keeps his voice as hushed as he can. "Until then, we have to keep moving, and not draw attention to you. If there is another way out, I will help you find it. I promise."

"You promise?"

Despite the incoming threat, despite the fact that he has *failed,* Freddy nods, resolute.

"I promise."

The boy comes up to him, is tugged up by Freddy's hands in the same way as before, and slides into Freddy's hatch.

Just in time.

"Freddy! What are you doing here?"

Freddy freezes as he looks over his shoulder. Chica is standing next to the kiosks, her hand on her hip as she approaches. His sensors could detect every movement inside of his hatch, Gregory shaking from fatigue. He knows he has to keep a calm head in order to ensure Gregory's safety.

Why is this happening now? *Especially considering all they had been through in the past 15 minutes?*

"I am... looking for the child." He blinks, realizing she doesn't know he's aware why she's out. He is also grateful that the excuse works so well to explain his current state, with glass digging into his casing in places, and the odd red smear at the bottom of his hatch from when Gregory slipped in earlier. The maintenance tunnels are infamous for being unsanitary. "Why are you here?"

"You mean the intruder?" Chica tilts her head, clucking. "Aren't you supposed to be in your room? You took a nasty fall on the stage, Fred, and Vanessa said you have to stay there."

Freddy's ears droop. He'll have to lie to get out of this. He’s not good at lying, and isn't supposed to be, but Chica has always put too much trust into him. Besides, with the situation at hand, he didn't have much of a choice. "Ah... my apologies. I did not realize I was supposed

to stay there. In any case, even if he is considered an intruder—" Gregory tenses, and Freddy's fingers twitch. "—he is still only a boy, isn't he?"

"Well, regardless, he's not supposed to be here after hours. Security is too focused on trying to get him to do much of anything else, and we still need to get you to Parts and Service."

"I am well aware of that, Chica." Freddy clamps a hand against his chest, wishing he could soothe Gregory properly. How scared he must be, in the dark, with only orange light and Freddy's voice for company. "Despite that, we must still regard him as a guest. I do not understand why you are so intent on chasing him when simply asking him to come to you would be less frightening for him."

"He runs off every time I get near him!" Chica shakes her head, her earrings clacking against her casing. "I tell him that the security staff can help, and he screams at me to leave him alone!"

"Maybe he is simply overwhelmed!" The chicken's beak twists, frown deepening. "You must understand, he is trapped and on his lonesome, at least for the time being. We can provide him some entertainment and comfort while we wait for his parents to arrive."

"You know Vanessa won't let us do that." Chica replies, voice curt. "I know you mean well, Fred, but we're off schedule, and we don't know what he's capable of."

Freddy bristles at the accusation. Gregory is a *child!* What harm could he possibly cause to anyone? "Regardless of that or not, I believe he does not trust authority figures easily, and Vanessa might have scared him into being so cautious. We must be patient."

"Freddy." Chica's face falls, crumpling into admonishment. "She told me he stole from the gift shop, and he's been lurking around here the whole day, snagging things from the kitchen and shops. He's been more than just a nuisance—he's becoming a problem!"

"But you have not directly asked him *why!"* Freddy snaps, affronted at Chica's attempt to disregard his points entirely.

"Neither have *you!"* Chica snapped back, swinging her fists in frustration. She stomps up to him, jabbing his chest with her finger. Gregory quivers, and Freddy digs his nails into the plastic of his hand, he clenches it so hard. "You act like you know the kid, but you *don't!* Just because he's a kid doesn't mean he's a *good one,* and he's already caused enough issues!" She softens at Freddy's devastated look, ruffling her hair with her hand in frustration.

"Look, Freddy—" The bear schools his expression into something perfectly distant, and Chica clicks her tongue. "—listen. At the *very least,* running around the complex is dangerous for anyone, especially a *child* who doesn't know his way around." Freddy's jaw tightens, and Chica deflates. "If he's in one place, we can keep an eye on him. I'm sure Vanessa would be fine with clearing your system, and maybe we can sing a song or two and get him into better spirits before he gets picked up. Okay?"

"No." Freddy shakes his head. Something about this entire situation reeks of bad faith, and bad intentions. For the time being, Gregory is far more safe without being near their chief of security, and remaining in Freddy's care instead. "I regret to remind you that it is our responsibility to protect any and all children from potential threats, including our own members of staff. If given enough evidence to the contrary, I am programmed to make a decision myself—"

"You can't protect the kid forever!" Chica squawks, desperate now. "Eventually Monty or Roxy is gonna get ahold of him when you're not around, and I don't know how they're gonna handle him—"

"This conversation is *over."* Freddy growls, twisting his body away from Chica's extending arm. "You have said quite enough, Chica, and I will not humor you any longer."

"—Freddy." Chica pleads. "I know about the last time a kid was out near closing time, and I know you're just doing what Bonnie did, but that doesn't mean it's applicable to this situation—"

"Chica!" Freddy's voice rose, straining his voice box. *"Enough!"*

She practically sinks back, eyes wide and hands raised. Something shifts in her violet gaze, and she turns her head away from him, unable to look at him.

For a moment, Freddy feels bad. He didn't mean to yell at her—she is just doing what she believes to be the correct course of action. But he can't shake the feeling that, if Gregory is stuck with Vanessa, it will end *badly.* He made a promise to the boy to get him out and to keep him safe. He can't just abandon him now.

He feels Gregory put a hand on his chest plate. Freddy blinks, and realizes that the boy has no idea why he is so upset, who Bonnie is, or what any of it means.

"I am sorry, Chica." Freddy mumbles, ashamed. "I did not mean to—"

"—no, you're right!" She snaps her head back to him, eyes narrowed. "This conversation *is* over. You aren't listening to anything I have to say, and I'm not gonna waste my time asking you to be sensible."

Freddy's motors hiss in displeasure, crossing his arms protectively over his chest. "Go, then. You have a child to catch, do you not?"

With a huff, Chica storms off, past the gates and up the escalator. Freddy watches her go, a deep exhaustion prickling at his vision.

"I'm sorry." Gregory murmurs, his voice muffled by the metal. "I didn't mean to cause any problems."

"We need to have a discussion about what Chica spoke about, Gregory." He rose his head to stare up at the statue of himself, gleeful as he he holds up a microphone. It is a sobering reminder of his station. "However, we will not have it now. We need to keep moving."

Gregory falls quiet after that. Freddy can't find the heart to keep talking.

Without any conversation, he is stuck stewing with his thoughts as he trundles back to a safer area.

Something has changed in him. Freddy is well aware of his scripting—he is the one who follows it the most. While he and his friends may have some sort of sentience, he is the one to stick closest to the rulebook. Deviations are dangerous.

Gregory is a deviation. Yet, Freddy can't bring himself to *care*.

He knows he is playing with something he is not knowledgeable about. He isn't as familiar with what alerts are due to his changes in behavior, or are system demands being pushed at their limits. Despite that concern, he feels as though he has been afflicted with something

worse than his previous glitches, and his forced low power.

It is that he has a growing attachment to the boy stashed away in his hutch.

Whatever is going on now is just a continuation of what has happened before. Freddy's protocol demands he protect all children, regardless of age or temperament. He knows that some faces who come to the Pizzaplex do not return for many different reasons, but one has been remarkably consistent the past few months.

Children have been disappearing. A handful have been found, unable to explain what happened to them. A few have been found injured. He remembers the instance Chica had so horribly reminded him of.

He does not want Gregory to fall victim to whatever lurks the complex.

He made a promise, didn't he?

Freddy doesn't break his promises.

End Notes

i hope this was more of a pleasure to read then it was to write because wow this was a pain

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